

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (DFNSI)  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) FOR THE  
BIATHLON PROJECT AT MACDONALD PASS,  
HELENA NATIONAL FOREST (HNF)**

**Introduction**

The Montana Army National Guard (MTARNG) and the Helena National Forest (HNF) prepared an EA to identify and evaluate potential environmental effects associated with a proposed biathlon course at MacDonald Pass. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 42 USC § 4321 to 4370e), the Council of Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (CEQ Regulations, 40 CFR 1500-1508), and *Environmental Analysis of Army Actions* (32 CFR 651).

The MTARNG and HNF will be making independent decisions regarding the Biathlon Project. Signature of this FNSI constitutes approval of the biathlon course construction and operation by the MTARNG. If the HNF prepares a FNSI and Decision Notice, the HNF would be authorizing use of National Forest lands to the MTARNG for development of the Biathlon Project and authorizing a 25-year Special Use Permit (SUP) subject to annual reviews.

**1. Description of Alternatives Considered in Detail**

**Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative.** Under the No Action Alternative, a SUP would not be issued and the Biathlon Project would not be implemented. Analysis of a No Action Alternative is required by CEQ Regulations to serve as a benchmark against which the Action Alternatives can be evaluated.

**Alternative 2.** Under Alternative 2, the MTARNG would construct and operate a biathlon course on MacDonald Pass. Approximately 8.1 miles of existing trails would be rebuilt and 2.2 miles of new cross-country ski trails would be added. Supporting facility would include a parking lot, spectator deck, five facilities, a shooting range, electrical power lines, and a propane tank. Approximately 0.25 miles of new access road would be built off the entrance, which is shared with a private residence.

**Alternative 3.** Alternative 3 is similar to that of Alternative 2, but would have the following modifications due to issues of concern raised during the public scoping period.

- The access road to the biathlon facility from Highway 12 would be located approximately 800 feet west of the current entrance point, due to vehicle line-of-sight concerns.
- The size (square footage) of the five facilities and parking lot would be reduced and only one latrine would be constructed.
- The location of the maintenance building, range and parking lot would be slightly changed to avoid spring seepage and minimize potential impacts to the wetland area.
- The biathlon range would not be used during September and October, which would reduce impact to wildlife, hunting opportunities, and other recreation resources.

- The biathlon range and trails would be used for one summer biathlon competition, most likely the second weekend in July.
- Three existing groomed trail segments would no longer be groomed to ensure that there is no-net-gain in groomed snow routes, per the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy.
- A concrete lip would be installed around the entire concrete pad that the targets would sit on.
- The access road to the biathlon facility would remain open during March to provide the public access to the ski trails (depending on snow conditions).

**Alternative 3 with Modifications.** Based on comments received during the public comment period, it was determined that a slight modification of Alternative 3 would better address public concerns than Alternative 3 alone. Consequently, Alternative 3 with Modifications is now the Preferred Alternative. Under this alternative, range use would be as described under Alternative 3 in the EA, but during the months of June/July/August/September, the MTARNG would only be allowed to host one summer biathlon competition. Under Alternative 3 with Modifications, there would be no other authorized range use during June/July/August/September. Alternative 3 with Modifications allows for flexibility in scheduling the competition, thus reducing conflict with other resource needs (e.g. wildlife) while allowing for scheduling flexibility.

## **2. Environmental Analysis**

Based on the analysis contained in the EA, implementation of the Preferred Alternative will not have significant adverse impacts on the environment, provided that the below mitigation measures are implemented. A detailed analysis of each resource can be found in Chapter 3 of the final EA.

**Mitigation.** The following mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce the potential impacts of the proposed project:

- a. Tree removal and construction activity will be minimized to reduce impacts to aesthetics, noise, and wildlife.
- b. The MTARNG will prepare and implement a revegetation plan, using reseeding material that would not be palatable to bears to avoid attracting them to the area.
- c. The MTARNG will abide by the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Food Storage Order as a condition of the SUP.
- d. Facilities will consist of materials and colors that blend in with the surrounding environment.
- e. The MTARNG will develop and implement a lead abatement plan as a condition of the SUP.
- f. Direction signage will be added to all trails.
- g. The MTARNG will post signs indicating range use.

- h. To reduce noise impacts during operation of the biathlon course, the MTARNG will use directional loudspeakers aimed directly at the spectator and competitor areas. The loudspeakers will be as close as possible to the spectators and competitors, and volume will be reduced to the minimum level required for participants to understand announcements.
- i. 4-stroke snowmobile and all-terrain vehicles will be used over machines with 2-stroke engines.
- j. High-grade mufflers will be installed on snow groomers to reduce noise impacts.
- k. Manually adjustable or self-adjusting back-up alarms will be used on snow groomers.
- l. The MTARNG will implement a semi-annual maintenance and lubrication schedule to ensure that groomers, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles are operating properly.
- m. If possible, salvaged topsoil will be spread onto the access road cut slopes and the range area.
- n. Off-route motorized travel will be prohibited.
- o. Any sightings of threatened and endangered species during construction and operation will be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.
- p. Biathlon activity will be scheduled to minimize impacts to wolves if dens or rendezvous sites occur within 1 mile of the project area.

In addition to the preceding measures, Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are commonly used by the HNF will be implemented under the Preferred Alternative. The BMPs can be found in Appendix C of the final EA.

### **3. Regulations**

The Proposed Action will not violate NEPA, the CEQ Regulations, 32 CFR 651, or any other Federal, state, or local environmental regulations.

### **4. Commitment of Implementation**

The MTARNG affirms their commitment to implement this EA in accordance with NEPA.

### **5. Public Review and Comment**

The proposed Biathlon Project was then listed on the Schedule of Proposed Actions for the HNF in January of 2004. The MTARNG and HNF released a description of the proposed action and solicited scoping comments from May 13 to June 13, 2005. During the scoping process, an open house was held at the Helena Ranger District office. Meetings were also held with the area's recreation home permittees and the Last Chance Nordic Ski Club. The open house was advertised in the Helena *Independent*

*Record*, on the Helena Civic Television, and through a mass mailing to all individuals and agencies that expressed interest in the project. 196 scoping comments were received by the MTARNG and HNF during the scoping period. A list of the scoping issues can be found in Section 1.6 and Appendix B of the EA.

The draft EA was made available for public review from June 28 – August 14, 2006. An open house was held at the Lewis & Clark Library during the review period. Copies of the EA and supporting documents were available at the HNF Supervisor's Office, Helena Ranger District, MTARNG Environmental Office, Lewis and Clark Public Library, and the Internet. The MTARNG and HNF received 109 comments during the draft EA public review.

The final EA and draft FNSI were made available for public review and comment for 30 days at locations in the preceding paragraph. For further information, please contact Ms. Becky Myers, MTARNG Environmental Office, at (406) 324-3087.

## **6. Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI)**

After careful review of the EA, I have concluded that implementation of the Preferred Alternative will not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Per 32 CFR 651, the Final EA and draft FNSI will be made available for a 30-day public review and comment period. Once any public comments have been addressed and if a determination is made that the Preferred Alternative will have no significant impact, the FNSI will be signed and the action will be implemented. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA and the CEQ Regulations. An Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared, and the National Guard Bureau is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

---

Date

---

Jeffrey G. Phillips  
Colonel, US Army  
Chief, Environmental  
Programs Division